



TOLEDO FIRE & RESCUE DEPARTMENT

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February 23, 2021

Chairman Manning, Vice Chair McColley, Ranking Member Thomas and Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee:

I appreciate the opportunity extended to OFCA to offer proponent testimony regarding Senate Bill 16 as it relates to the fire service.

Unfortunately, the times we live in and the manner in which first responders are viewed by some in society necessitates such legislation. Although once revered by those we serve, this is decreasingly the case in many areas of the state, and those sworn to serve the public have instead become targets of other's anger, spite, and frustration. Many times these attacks are made while first responders engage in patient care or other duties, and they are caught off-guard with little or no time to defend themselves. Such attacks also jeopardize the health and well-being of those requesting our services.

The increased penalties for assaulting, impeding, and/or intimidating first responders or family members thereof are appropriate as both punitive and potential deterrents for such activities. Fire/EMS personnel are recognized as the first line of defense in civilized society. When called into action, first responders are compelled by oath of office to render aid, conduct suppression efforts, or otherwise mitigate the emergency without consideration for the emotional temperature within that particular response area. Although we make every attempt to avoid unsafe scenes, many times the threat to our health and welfare is not readily apparent.

While maintaining one's right to lawfully assemble, Senate Bill 16 draws a distinction between this constitutional right and the overt impedance of emergency activities of first responders. Actions of civil unrest that elevate to the point where we cannot respond to the emergency scene or to a medical facility while transporting a critical patient are intolerable. Interfering with an emergency agency's ability to provide a taxpayer-funded service is a violation to both the responding agency and the deserving public. Such engagements go far beyond any social justice agenda and border on moral bankruptcy.

On behalf of the OFCA, I heartily endorse this legislation and the insight shown by Senator Schaffer in its introduction.

James Price
Deputy Fire Chief
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OFCA Legislative Committee Member